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The Director of Central Intelligence

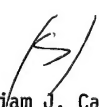
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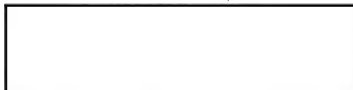
MEMORANDUM FOR: The Vice President  
Secretary of State  
Secretary of Defense  
Counsellor to the President  
Chief of Staff and Assistant  
to the President  
Chairman of the Joint Chiefs  
of Staff

SUBJECT : National Intelligence Council  
Memorandum: "Soviet Policy and Africa" ☐

I would like to call to your special attention the attached paper "Soviet Policy and Africa," published this week by the National Intelligence Council. I especially invite your attention to the paper's summary overview and the section on important Soviet vulnerabilities in Africa subject to exploitation by the US. I believe the paper will inform our deliberations about US policy in Africa and, in its more detailed assessment, will serve as useful basic documentation of Soviet activities there across the board. ☐

  
William J. Casey

Attachment:  
NIC M 81-10003J



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## Soviet Policy and Africa

National Intelligence Council  
Memorandum

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March 1981

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## Soviet Policy and Africa

### National Intelligence Council Memorandum

*Information available as of 23 February 1981  
was used in the preparation of this Memorandum.*

This memorandum is based on substantial contributions by the Offices of Political Analysis, Economic Research, and Strategic Research in the National Foreign Assessment Center and by the Directorate of Operations, and has been coordinated with these components. It was prepared by [ ] the Analytic Group of the National Intelligence Council under the supervision of the National Intelligence Officer for the USSR and Eastern Europe, with the cooperation of the National Intelligence Officer for Africa.

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**Soviet Policy  
and Africa**

**Overview**

Soviet policy toward Africa represents more than the mere exploitation of opportunities. It is driven by objectives that have remained reasonably stable over the years:

- To offset and undermine Western political, economic, and military influence.
- To expand the Soviet presence on the continent.
- To facilitate the expansion of Soviet influence in North Africa, the Arabian Peninsula, and the Indian Ocean littoral.
- To promote specific Soviet military interests.
- To enhance Soviet claims to a global superpower role.
- To gain political support from African countries for Soviet undertakings in international forums.
- To stimulate changes advantageous to the USSR in African regimes. (c)

Soviet success in achieving these aims has been mixed. For a variety of reasons, the Soviets suffered a number of setbacks before 1974: the overthrow of Nkrumah in Ghana (1966); the coup against a pro-Soviet regime in Mali (1968); a decline in Soviet influence in Guinea; the failure of a Communist coup in Sudan (1971); and the expulsion of the USSR from Egypt (1972). More recently, the Soviets have been confronted by:

- The loss of use of the naval and air facilities at Berbera, resulting from the Soviets' decision to pursue what they viewed as greater opportunities and stakes in Ethiopia, although they knew this would put their gains in Somalia at serious risk.
- The transfer of power in Zimbabwe in 1980 to a black majority government controlled by Robert Mugabe's ZANU rather than the Soviet-backed Joshua Nkomo's ZAPU.
- Termination by Guinea in 1977 of the right to stage TU-95 maritime reconnaissance flights from Conakry.

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- The refusal by Cape Verde in 1980 to grant the USSR naval access rights.

Since 1974, Moscow has been able to take advantage of a confluence of circumstances that offered new opportunities and tools with which to pursue its aims, particularly in countries experiencing new nationhood—the type of African country in which the Soviets scored gains in the 1960s. Soviet activity from 1974 to date has marked a new phase in Soviet relations with Sub-Saharan Africa, reflecting:

- Major openings presented by the collapse of the Portuguese empire, conflict between Somalia and Ethiopia, the fall of the Haile Selassie regime, and growing black opposition to white rule in southern Africa.
- A Soviet perception that the United States has, until recently, been unwilling or unable effectively to contest the spread of Soviet influence in Africa, and that such expansion would accordingly entail little military risk.
- A Soviet assessment of the enhanced strategic significance of the Horn of Africa—with respect to the promotion of Soviet interests on the Arabian Peninsula and in the Persian Gulf and Indian Ocean regions generally.
- The need to compensate for the reduction of Soviet influence in the Middle East occasioned by the deterioration of relations with Egypt beginning in 1972 and by the Camp David accords of 1978.
- A greater willingness on the part of some African states as well as insurgent groups to accept Communist military assistance and support, and of Africans to tolerate large-scale and overt combat involvement by Communist states in African affairs.
- The availability of a proxy—Cuba—especially well suited to the military and political requirements of the situations at hand.
- Possible heightened Soviet concerns about future deployment to the Indian Ocean of US strategic systems—both ballistic missile submarines and carrier-based aircraft.

Under these changed circumstances the Soviets managed to achieve major gains and significantly strengthened their position in Africa, although they were not immune to reverses. Since 1974 the Soviets have:

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- Used their airlift and sealift capabilities to provide large-scale military assistance, military advisers, and technicians to clients at great distances from the USSR.
- Helped keep in power pro-Soviet regimes in Angola and Ethiopia.
- Signed a treaty of friendship and cooperation with Mozambique, although so far they have neither gained access to military facilities nor entrenched themselves in the government structure.
- Exercised command and control functions for Ethiopia in its war with Somalia.
- Gained the use of an austere naval facility on Ethiopia's Dahlak Island in the Red Sea as a support facility for the USSR's Indian Ocean naval contingent, partly compensating for the loss of better facilities at Berbera in Somalia.
- Used their presence in Ethiopia to conduct reconnaissance flights over the Red Sea, Arabian Sea, and Indian Ocean from Asmara, continuing activities they formerly staged from Berbera.
- Used Luanda in Angola as a naval facility and staging point for reconnaissance flights over the South Atlantic, compensating for the loss of Conakry.
- Greatly increased military assistance and arms sales to Sub-Saharan Africa: from \$715 million in the period 1959-74 to \$4.74 billion in 1975-80 (half of which went to Ethiopia).
- Profited from the employment in combat operations of large numbers of Cuban proxy military personnel in Angola and Ethiopia. (In 1980 there were 15,000 to 19,000 Cuban soldiers in Angola and 11,000 to 13,000 in Ethiopia.)
- Encouraged and coordinated the placement of hundreds of East Germans in security, organizational, and propaganda training jobs in Angola, Ethiopia, Mozambique, and other countries.
- Channeled arms to insurgents operating in Namibia, Rhodesia (Zimbabwe), and South Africa.
- Quietly begun to provide technical military assistance and even military advisers to the Libyan forces now in Chad.

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The new Soviet activeness in Africa does not signify that the region as a whole has any higher priority in Soviet eyes relative to other regions than it had previously. Sub-Saharan Africa still ranks lower than the United States, Eastern Europe, Western Europe, China, Southwest Asia, Southeast Asia, and the Middle East as an area of Soviet foreign policy concern. The USSR has no truly vital security interests at stake in the region that it must defend. Soviet military objectives in the area are—aside from Indian Ocean and Persian Gulf concerns—of a regional rather than global strategic character; peacetime designs are probably more important than those keyed to a general East-West war; and desired political gains are just as salient as purely military ones. 

Whether the circumstances that permitted Soviet gains since 1974 will persist in the years ahead is uncertain. There will clearly be continuing opportunities for the USSR and its proxies to fish in troubled waters. The potential openings are many:

- The political, economic, and social weaknesses that will continue to afflict Africa.
- The tendency of African military organizations to acquire as much weaponry as possible regardless of the real level of threat.
- Abiding African suspicions of Europe and the United States.
- The presence of apartheid in South Africa and its impact on the domestic and foreign policies of other countries in Africa. Clearly, the Soviets view support for the African struggle for majority rule in Namibia and South Africa—in all of its political, economic, military, and diplomatic dimensions—as a key element in their approach to Sub-Saharan Africa over the next decade. 

Of the many problems Soviet and Soviet proxy actions in Africa may create for the United States in the next several years, the most acute could be:

- Extension of the USSR's influence in Sub-Saharan Africa by providing military assistance—either directly or through the Cubans—to Soviet clients in the event of internal instability in Zaire, Zambia, or Zimbabwe, or by collaborating with the Libyans to exploit instability in Chad or Sudan.

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- Soviet provision of significantly larger numbers of advisers and equipment, or more support for the Cubans, in order to prop up Moscow's "own" regimes in Angola, Mozambique, and Ethiopia if they were threatened with internal collapse, whether provoked or not by US assistance to dissident elements.
- Military conflict between a Soviet client regime and a third country—with or without Soviet encouragement. For example, Ethiopian encroachment on Somalia, or—less likely—fighting between Angola and South Africa linked with Namibia.
- Soviet acquisition of a new foothold in West Africa.
- An increased Soviet naval and air presence in the region, if the Soviets were successful in obtaining access to port facilities and airfields in various countries ☐

We do not believe, however, that Soviet behavior in Sub-Saharan Africa is likely to present a frontal challenge to the West in the areas of access to strategic metals or oil. Even under circumstances favorable to the Soviets they would not be able either to seize Sub-Saharan strategic metals for themselves, or—barring a collapse of political order in South Africa—to impose a prolonged denial of them to the West; nor does Soviet behavior to date suggest that the Soviets themselves are currently pursuing either a seizure or a denial strategy in the near or middle term. Likewise, Soviet naval activities around the Horn and off the coast of East Africa do not signal an active intention of interfering with the flow of oil supplies for the West, given the supremely high risk this would entail and Soviet naval inferiority in the region. Rather, these activities are intended to promote essentially political objectives—as well as enhance the USSR's future strategic capabilities in the area. ☐

Increased Soviet activity in Sub-Saharan Africa will not necessarily assure greatly heightened future Soviet influence. Indeed, during the past year Soviet comment has betrayed a sense of frustration over Moscow's loss of initiative in the region. The Soviets are probably worried by the possibility of a peaceful Western-sponsored Namibian settlement, by their own failure to back the right horse in Zimbabwe, by US success in winning a grant of military facilities from Kenya, by the pro-Western stance of Nigeria, and by the tendency even for clients like Angola and Mozambique to seek greater economic ties with the West. ☐

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In the future, as the Soviets encounter new opportunities, they will also face old constraints:

- Foremost among these is the preference of virtually all African regimes, including recipients of Soviet and proxy assistance, to manage their own affairs.
- Virtually all African regimes are suspicious of Soviet motives.
- The Soviets and their proxies are not alone in Africa. Most African countries operate within a Western-oriented international economic order, and receive sizable assistance from the major Western powers and international organizations, which the Soviets cannot match.
- The difficulty of translating military or economic assistance into lasting political influence, a problem the Soviets have always faced in Africa

But, in addition, there are new factors that could seriously impair the ability of the USSR in the 1980s to extend its gains:

- South African intervention against the MPLA forces in Angola and Somalia violation of the territorial integrity of Ethiopia made it possible for the USSR and Cuba to introduce their military contingents in those countries while remaining on the "right" side of the Africans. Such fortuitous circumstances might not be repeated in the future.
- Africans may be more chary now of superpower involvement than they were in the 1970s.
- The Soviets are encountering difficulties in consolidating their influence in Angola, Mozambique, and Ethiopia. Existing frictions may well multiply as Moscow attempts to impose a pattern of institutionalization of power favorable to its own interests, while failing to respond adequately to the economic needs of its clients.
- The Cubans are more than Soviet agents; they have their own policy aims, which have conflicted with Soviet aims in the past and could do so in the future

Despite the opportunities already mentioned for maneuver in Sub-Saharan Africa which the Soviets may be able to create or exploit, and despite the expanded means at their disposal to do so, the Soviets in the 1980s will nevertheless be vulnerable to Western counteraction, particularly with respect to:

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- The Soviet inability to compete with the West in trade and economic development assistance.
- The dissatisfaction of African military forces with the quality of Soviet arms, availability of spare parts, level of maintenance provided, and training.
- The dependence of the Soviets on Cuban proxy military forces. It could force difficult and potentially embarrassing choices on the Soviets if, for whatever reason, the Cubans decided to remove or substantially reduce their troops in Angola or Ethiopia when this was not desired by the host regime.
- The incompleteness so far with which Soviet-style political controls have been institutionalized in Angola, Mozambique, and Ethiopia, and the consequent potential for leadership defection from Soviet tutelage and for divergence of the system from the Soviet-preferred model.
- Suspicion among Africans of Soviet intentions, which has been reinforced by Moscow's arm-twisting attempts to exploit dependency relations for short-term tactical gains, and by African awareness of attempted Soviet subversion.
- The perception widely held by Africans that "Russians" harbor racist attitudes.
- Soviet lack of leverage to encourage the sort of negotiated resolutions of the Namibian and—perhaps eventually—South African problems that many leaders of black African countries would probably prefer to see.

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